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UN appeals for \$74 million to help flood victims in Philippines

6 October - The United Nations today launched an appeal for \$74 million to help 1 million flood-stricken people in the Philippines – which has been hit by massive back-to-back storms – for the next six months.

Some 300 people were killed when Tropical Storm Ketsana (also known as Ondoy) slammed into the South-East Asian nation last week, displacing hundreds of thousands. It brought the equivalent of one year's worth of rain in just 12 hours, and with waters rising so rapidly, people in low-lying areas sought refuge on their roofs to avoid being swept away.

The devastation wrought by that deadly storm was amplified by Typhoon Parma, which made landfall in recent days, killing at least 16 people and affecting 70,000 others. That storm struck an area focused on agriculture, resulting in a nearly \$120 million loss in crops. Pre-emptively, 35,000 people were evacuated, but the number of people sheltering camps is expected to rise to 100,000.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), approximately 16,000 houses were destroyed by the storm and subsequent flooding, while a further 23,000 were partially damaged.

Some 400,000 people are living in emergency shelters around the hard-hit capital, Manila, 80 per cent of which is inundated, and many people expected to return to their homes once the water has receded.

To jumpstart the appeal, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes said today that he has allocated \$7 million for the Philippines emergency from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), set up to finance sudden-onset or under-funded crises.



Survivors line up for water at a community wiped out by devastating floods by Ketsana in the Philippines capital Manila

The \$74 million flash appeal, he said, is the largest ever for the Philippines, which is “no stranger to disasters and certainly to floods.”

It was developed in partnership with the Philippines National Disaster Management Agency, and appealing organizations include UN agencies, along with the Philippines National Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and others.

After one month when there is a clearer picture of humanitarian needs, the flash appeal will be revised.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) is asking for \$26 million as part of the larger \$74 million appeal to fund its three-month emergency operation, already under way, to support the Government’s efforts by providing rice, beans and other food in the worst-hit areas of Manila and surrounding areas. The agency is also giving logistical support to allow humanitarian agencies to access remote areas.

WFP said today that it is also rushing helicopters and inflatable boats to reach flood victims in remote areas with humanitarian aid.

“Many needy people live in areas that still remain inaccessible because of the widespread flooding,” said Stephen Anderson, the agency’s Country Director in the Philippines.

Seven boats, the first of 30 requested by the Government, arrived today in Manila, while two of three helicopters, also asked for by authorities, are set to land in the country tomorrow.

Without these boats and helicopters, Mr. Anderson said, “the massive Government-led relief effort would not be able to reach people who are really desperate, sometimes neck-deep in water.”

For its part, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has identified access to drinking water as the major concern in the wake of the devastating storms, with some parts of the country having been flooded with stagnant water now for many days.

Additionally, some evacuation centres are filled beyond their capacity, raising concern over possible health risks, with cases of diarrhoea and skin diseases already being reported.

UNICEF, which is asking for nearly \$13 million from the wider appeal launched today, has already distributed hundreds of hygiene kits, and its Executive Director Ann Veneman is set to visit Manila tomorrow to assess the situation first-hand.

Appealing for \$7 million today was the World Health Organization (WHO), which reported that it is sending medical supplies since nearly two dozen hospitals and health centres have been damaged by flooding.

UN Rwandan genocide court nets second fugitive in two months

6 October - A former senior Rwandan military officer indicted by the United Nations war crimes tribunal for his role in the 1994 genocide in the tiny Central African country was handed over to the court today after being on the run for nearly nine years – the second fugitive to be delivered up in two months.

Idelphonse Nizeyimana, former second in command for intelligence and military operations at an officers’ school, was arrested in Kampala, Uganda, yesterday by the National Central Bureau of Interpol in collaboration with the tracking team of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and transferred today to the court’s detention facility in Arusha, Tanzania.



Idelphonse Nizeyimana in this undated photo

Mr. Nizeyimana, who faces five counts of genocide or complicity in genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, and crimes against humanity, including ordering the execution of former Rwandan Queen Rosalie Gicanda, a symbolic figure for all Tutsis, is one of four top accused earmarked to be tried as part of the ICTR completion strategy.

Eleven accused are still at large out of the 81 people indicted for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in Rwanda in 1994, when an estimated 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and Hutu moderates were killed by Hutu militants, mainly by machete, during a period of less than 100 days.

Mr. Nizeyimana, through the chain of command, is alleged to have exercised authority over soldiers and personnel and was perceived as a member of the elite inner circle (Akazu) of the late President Juvenal Habyarimana.

In August Grégoire Ndahimana, a high-level figure in the rebel Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), was arrested in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and later handed over to ICTR in a transfer facilitated by the UN Mission in the DRC, known as MONUC.

MONUC said Mr. Nizeyimana was also a key FDLR leader. "In this context, his arrest is an important step forward in the fight against impunity and strongly signals the Great Lakes region's commitment to peace and security," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a statement welcoming the arrest.

This is the second time that Uganda has cooperated with the ICTR, which commended Interpol and the Ugandan authorities for their close cooperation. "It is hoped that the ICTR will continue receiving similar support from other member States at this critical junction of its work," the tribunal said in a statement.

UN calls for steps to save millions of children from trafficking, abuse

6 October - Scores of millions of children worldwide are subject to trafficking, sexual abuse or child labour, lack parental care or documents needed to access schools and health care, or face violence in their homes, schools or communities, according to a new United Nations report released today.

"A society cannot thrive if its youngest members are forced into early marriage, abused as sex workers or denied their basic rights," UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Ann M. Veneman said in Tokyo on the release of the report, which calls for improving child protection systems and promoting social change.



"Understanding the extent of abuses of children's rights is a first step to building an environment where children are protected and have the opportunity to reach their full potential," she added of the report which covers issues ranging from sexual abuse and child marriage to physical punishment and genital mutilation.

While progress is being made in reducing some violations of children's rights, not enough is yet known about the extent of abuses against children and violence and exploitation remain a harsh reality, according to the report, *Progress for Children: A Report Card on Child Protection*.

Some abuses, such as sexual exploitation and trafficking, are usually committed in conditions of secrecy and illegality, which makes collection of accurate data challenging. Child labour reaps a particularly heavy toll with 150 million youngsters aged between five and 14 in the work force.

The report gathers together for the first time data on a range of issues, including sexual abuse and trafficking, child marriage, physical punishment of children, child labour, birth registration, the harmful traditional practice of female genital cutting, and attitudes toward violence against women inside marriage.

Where data are available, some progress is evident. For example, in Bangladesh, Guinea and Nepal, where child marriage is prevalent, the median age of marriage is rising, although it is still below 18. The report also cites a slow decline in female genital mutilation in countries where such abuse is common.

It finds that more than half the children in detention worldwide have not been tried or sentenced, while in some regions, the births of two out of three children were not registered in 2007, with less than 5 per cent of births registered in Somalia and

Liberia. Without a birth certificate youngsters are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, trafficking and illegal adoption.

Another finding shows that more than half of women and girls in developing countries think that wife-beating is acceptable and, younger women are as likely to justify wife-beating as older women. In most regions, neglecting the children is the most commonly cited justification for wife-beating.

“The evidence of continuing harm and abuse must inspire the world to greater effort to guarantee the rights of all children, everywhere,” Ms. Veneman said.

Mobile communication subscriptions soar to 4.6 billion, says UN body



6 October - The rapidly growing information and communications technology (ICT) industry is set to see mobile subscriptions reach 4.6 billion worldwide by the end of the year, according to figures released by the United Nations telecommunications arm today.

The data, published by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), reveals that the ICT market continues to expand unabated, with subscriptions for mobile broadband services topping 600 million in 2009, outstripping fixed broadband by 100 million.

More than a quarter of the world's population is now online and using the Internet, according to ITU's *The World in 2009: ICT facts and figures*.

“ICTs are vital within developing countries to ensure that ordinary people can fully participate in the knowledge economy of the 21st century,” said ITU Secretary-General Hamadoun Touré.

“We have seen a positive impact on services such as health and education in markets where ICT growth has been strong,” added Mr. Touré.

However, despite making major inroads towards extending ICTs in developing countries, including a number of countries launching the latest networks and services, the statistics in ITU's publication highlight significant regional discrepancies with mobile penetration rates.

“There is still a large digital divide, and an impending broadband divide, which needs to be addressed urgently,” warned Sami Al Basheer, Director of ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau.

The report noted that in Africa there is only one fixed broadband subscriber for every 1,000 people, compared with Europe where there are some 200 subscribers per 1,000 people, and the relative price for ICT services, especially broadband, is highest in Africa, the region with the lowest income levels.

“Heads of State and industry leaders will collaborate at ITU Telecom World 2009 to identify the right policies and regulations to support and encourage future ICT growth worldwide,” said Mr. Al Basheer.

In a related development, the world's most advanced system against global cyber-attacks was unveiled today at Telecom World in Geneva, a week-long gathering which brings together top names from across the ICT industry.

IMPACT (the International Multilateral Partnership against Cyber Threats) set up its Global Response Centre (GRC) in Malaysia earlier this year as the international community's foremost cyber-threat resource, to proactively track and defend against menaces on the Internet.

“Every country is now critically dependent on technology for commerce, finance, health care, emergency services, food distribution and more,” said Mr. Touré, who spoke at the presentation. “Loss of vital networks would quickly cripple any nation, and none is immune to cyber-attack.”

Mr. Al-Basheer said that by facilitating the access for ITU Member States to a global platform, “we are realizing effective international cooperation. This is the very first time that so many nations are agreeing to work together to achieve a global culture of cyber-security, and we hope that all 191 ITU Member States will benefit from this unique initiative.”

Indian Ocean nations to test UN-backed tsunami warning system



Aerial view of vast destruction of the Indonesian coast caused by 2004 tsunami

6 October - Eighteen countries around the Indian Ocean Rim will participate in a United Nations-backed tsunami exercise on 14 October to coincide with World Disaster Reduction Day, the first time that the warning system set up following the devastating disaster that struck the region in 2004 will be tested.

The exercise takes place in the wake of the tsunami that killed more than 100 people in Samoa last month, “providing a sober reminder that coastal communities everywhere need to be aware and prepared for such events,” stated the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Following the 2004 tsunami, UNESCO – through its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) – helped countries in the region set up the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWS).

The upcoming drill – known as “Exercise Indian Ocean Wave 09” – will test and evaluate the effectiveness of the system, identify weaknesses and areas of improvement, as well as aim to increase preparedness and improve coordination throughout the region.

The exercise will replicate the magnitude 9.2 earthquake that occurred off the northwest coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, in 2004, generating a destructive tsunami affecting countries from Australia to South Africa.

The simulated tsunami will spread in real time across the entire Indian Ocean, taking approximately 12 hours to travel from Indonesia to the coast of South Africa. Bulletins will be issued by the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) in Tokyo and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) in Hawaii, United States, which have served as the interim advisory services since 2005.

The recently established Regional Tsunami Watch Providers (RTWP) in Australia, India and Indonesia will also participate in the exercise and will share experimental real time bulletins between themselves only.

Countries participating in next week's drill are Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Timor-Leste.

A similar drill was held in October 2008 to test the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (PTWS). Such early warning systems have also been set up in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and Northeast Atlantic Ocean and connected seas.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today highlighted the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in addressing key issues, including natural disaster reduction.

“Through good climate science and information sharing, ICTs can help reduce the risk and impact of natural disasters,” he told heads of State and Chief Executive Officers attending Telecom World 2009 in Geneva. “When an earthquake hits, a coordinated ICT system can monitor developments, send out emergency messages and help people to cope.”

Organized by the UN International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Telecom World is a unique event for the ICT community which brings together the top names from across the industry and around the world. This year's forum highlights the reach and role of telecommunications and ICT in areas such as the digital divide, climate change, and disaster relief.

UNICEF supports efforts to immunize Rwandan children against measles

6 October - The third Mother and Child Health Week, backed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has kicked off in Rwanda with a twist, with the campaign immunizing children against measles for the first time in the African Great Lakes nation.

Measles accounts for less than 2 per cent of deaths of children under the age of five in Rwanda, but "we have to ensure that children continue to remain protected from this life-threatening illness," said Joseph Foubi, UN Resident Coordinator ad interim and UNICEF Representative in the country.



A child being vaccinated against measles

Rwanda has made strides in slashing by half the number of under-five child deaths from preventable causes, from 196 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 103 live births in 2007, UNICEF said in a press release issued in the district of Bugesera.

The Health Weeks, which are held in several regions of the world, have proven to be an effective way to save lives at a low cost.

During the drive in Rwanda this week, children under five will be vaccinated against measles and polio, with some also receiving Vitamin A capsules to boost their immune systems and mebendazole to fight parasitic infections.

Over 45,000 people – volunteers, community health workers and local leaders – will fan out across the country to ensure that more than 1.5 million women and children are brought to vaccination sites and health centres to receive care.

UN mission helps launch search for Liberia's young singing sensations



6 October - Young people across Liberia will get their shot at fame as national auditions get under way for a televised music contest in the West African country, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) announced today as it helped launch the event.

The talent hunt for Liberians under the age of 20 to compete in "A Star is Born" was launched at the weekend during a joint event, hosted by the Government and UNMIL in Monrovia, the capital.

Describing music and culture as "uniting forces in any society that bring people together and help build a stronger Liberia for tomorrow," UNMIL Director of Mission Support Stephen Lieberman said the peacekeeping operation was proud to collaborate on the initiative with the Government and sponsors.

"There is a price that comes with this – this is not free," said Mr. Lieberman. "We look at the musical talent as a way to help us to help you convey the message to all the people of Liberia; important messages for you the youth of Liberia and for the future of Liberia."

The nationwide auditions for A Star is Born 2009-2010 series kicked off this week to select the 15 best singers who will be invited to a music academy in Monrovia.

At the academy, the participants will attend workshops, including sessions on sexual exploitation and abuse, HIV/AIDS and good citizenship.

In recent years, A Star is Born has produced young talents who have been instrumental in serving as role models for other young people and also helping to spread messages on social issues, UNMIL said in a news release.

The weekend launch prominently featured last year's winner, Nicholas Buigar, who recently participated in a West African competition in Lagos, Nigeria, where he finished first runner-up.

Killing of Nigerian news editor draws condemnation from top UN official



6 October - The head of the United Nations agency tasked with defending press freedom today condemned the recent killing of a Nigerian news editor, and called on authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Bayo Olu, the assistant news editor of the Nigerian daily newspaper, The Guardian, was shot dead in his home on 20 September as he was preparing to attend church, according to a news release issued by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

“The shooters removed the victim’s laptop and mobile phone from the house, leading to speculation that the killing may have been linked to his work as a journalist, according to the International Press Institute (IPI),” the news release added.

UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura spoke out against the killing, stating that freedom of expression is a basic human right and its corollary, press freedom, is essential for democracy and rule of law.

“Therefore, I trust that the authorities, in the interest of the whole of Nigerian society, will do all they can to bring the culprits of this crime to justice,” Mr. Matsuura said.

Iraq: top UN envoy discusses upcoming polls with senior religious leaders

6 October - The top United Nations envoy to Iraq has discussed next January’s Iraqi elections with Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Al-Sistani and other senior religious officials in the holy city of Najaf.

During the talks on 4 October, both Ad Melkert, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative, and Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani raised the issue of pending electoral legislation, according to a news release issued by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).



Ad Melkert

Mr. Melkert underscored the urgent need for the Council of Representatives to pass the Election Law, while Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani expressed his strong support for the electoral process and for broad participation in next year’s parliamentary elections.

The Special Representative, who also heads UNAMI, told the religious leaders of how the mission has stepped up its work in the political, humanitarian and human rights fields.

Last month, he welcomed what he described as growing confidence in the electoral process in Iraq, giving his backing to the voter registration process ahead of the polls.

“The importance of next January’s elections for the future of Iraq cannot be overstated,” Mr. Melkert said in remarks at a voter registration centre at Omar Mukhtar Secondary School in the capital, Baghdad.

“The number of people taking part in the registration update is an indicator of the growing confidence in the electoral process and the will of the Iraqi people to rebuild their country.”

Ban urges Somali Government and international partners to 'stay the course'



6 October - While the Somali Government continues to face a number of challenges, it has made some encouraging progress in the political and security fields and deserves the continued support of its international partners, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says.

In a new report to the Security Council, Mr. Ban cites a number of areas where the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) has made headway, including fostering reconciliation between itself and opposition groups, drafting the constitution and building a national security apparatus.

“I urge the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia to stay the course, and I appeal to the international community to redouble its support and rally solidly behind the Government,” he writes.

Mr. Ban notes that further progress to promote the peace process requires greater capacity on the part of the TFG to consolidate its authority, deliver administration and basic services, and effectively manage the transition. “The sustained support of the international community will constitute a key contribution to this end,” he says.

The Secretary-General states that the UN stands firmly by the African Union and its peacekeeping mission in Somalia, known as AMISOM, and pledges to continue its support of the force’s deployment and operations.

He says stabilizing the security situation in the capital, Mogadishu, remains a critical prerequisite to foster the peace process, as demonstrated by the 17 September suicide attack on AMISOM’s headquarters in which more than 20 members of the force were killed.

The UN will not be deterred by violent attacks by insurgents and will remain committed to continuing support to AMISOM, the TFG and the Somali people to facilitate reconciliation and consolidate the political process, Mr. Ban states, while calling again on the international community to boost support to the AU Mission and Government security forces.

He adds that a more secure environment would also further facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the country, where half the population of nearly 7 million is dependent on aid.

There are around 1.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country, and another 160,000 people have been uprooted since early May by fighting between Government forces and Al Shabaab and Hisb-ul-Islam opposition groups.

Mr. Ban states that he remains “deeply concerned” about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Somalia, noting that assassinations, abductions and threats against aid workers have rendered the delivery of assistance extremely dangerous, while ongoing fighting and drought are increasing the need for life-saving support.

“I call upon all parties to help create conditions conducive to safe, timely and unhindered humanitarian access and to cooperate with humanitarian actors to this end.”

He also voices concern about the lack of adequate funding for priority humanitarian and recovery programmes, and urges Member States to support efforts in that regard.

“It is necessary to avoid disruption of critical activities, including the delivery of essential food supplies, on which the civilian population depends,” he says. “Failure to do so could have serious implications for displacement and consequences for regional stability.”